2: Man G-5 (1869-1880)1932 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

confessed that it is tacitly understood that an equivalent should be rendered for every gift.

11. Like the Papuans they are merry, talkative, petulant, inquisitive, and restless. Their speech is rapid, with a constant repetition of the same idea, and a joke, if not played in too practical a form, is highly appreciated.

12. When out of temper with any one they never defame his relatives or use improper expressions, as is so common a practice among natives of India, but merely indulge in mild terms of abuse, such as the following:—

ngab-ted-inga tâ-paya! (You liar!)
ngūn-bâ-maya! (You duffer!)
ngūn-jā-bagya! or *ng'ab-mūgutigpī-chaya!* (You fool!)
ngī-chô-na! (You long head!)
ngig-chô-ronga-lâ-nta! (You long nose!)
ngig-pâ-namaya! (You sunken-eyed one!)
ngid-kī-nabya! or *ngī-gō-robya!* (You skin and bone!)

A quarrel, as may be supposed, generally results from this style of address.[1]

13. With the exception of those who have lived with us away from their friends from birth or early childhood, not a case can be cited in which a preference is not manifested for a jungle life, even after a sojourn of many years at the Orphanage or Homes at Port Blair.

14. Opportunities for comparing the mental capacity of the children with those of other races have been few, but these have tended to show that, up to the age of 12 or 14, they possess quite as much intelligence as ordinary middle-class children of civilised races when competing in subjects in which they have been instructed in common; but the precociousness of intellect which has so often been remarked in the very young does not appear to be long maintained. Dr. Brander, who was for some time in charge of the Andaman Hospital, gave it as his opinion, that as a race "they are not deficient in brain power; it rather lies dormant and unused in their savage state;" and he mentions the case of an aboriginal patient of 12 years of age, who had been educated in the Ross Orphanage School, and who, in spite of his tender years, could yet read English and Urdu fluently, as well as speak and write in both these languages, retaining also a knowledge of his mother tongue. He had, besides, acquired a fair knowledge of arithmetic. I may add that this is not an exceptional case, for I could instance others, and one lad in particular, who was his superior.

15. More lengthened observations than have hitherto been

[1] *Vide post* "Laws," paragraph 1.

11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
Onges

The Onges do not seem to require any preventive measures, and seem naturally immune to malaria. They do, however, transmit the disease to strangers, through the mosquitoes which are everywhere in Little Andaman. Like many other inhabitants of tropical areas, they probably all carry the disease without being affected by it – neither children nor adults show any sign of splenic enlargement.

In contrast to their periodic gorging, the Onges will equally cheerfully endure hunger, thirst and exhaustion. During our hazardous canoe trip to South Brother, however, they appeared much more affected than I was by long exposure to the sun. We were completely without any means of shelter for an entire afternoon in the open sea, and though the Onges tried to cover their heads as best they could, they still developed severe (and genuine) headaches, and were clearly much happier in the dark forest, which must be considered their natural environment.

Nothing has hitherto been known of the intelligence level and general psychology of the Onges. The childishness of their behaviour, however, is curiously in keeping with their strikingly child-like appearance. Like children, they seek only the satisfaction of elementary stimuli, and like children they pass in a flash from one mood to another, so that they are a people of sudden contrasts.

One example is their passionate love for their dogs, in marked contrast to the intense cruelty with which they hunt their prey. Having once realized the usefulness of dogs, first imported into the islands some thirty years ago, the Onges now pet them like little girls with their dolls, and the Onge women will suckle the family puppies quite naturally with their own children. Yet once a dog dies the other side of the Onge nature comes to the fore and the carcase is thrown into the forest – there is no looking back.

Their minds are in a sense inventive, in that they have evolved devices to help them acquire their food, but they have never, for example, thought of the fish-hook, despite the abundance of iron pieces thrown up by shipwrecks all round the islands. Anything new is taken up with a child's momentary enthusiasm, but they have no notion of sustained mental effort such as any form of counting.

Like children, too, the Onges laugh at the slightest thing, although their mirth is always restrained. In this they differ from the African peoples, particularly the Bushmen, who are often by

11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
Onges

Western standards taciturn or sly, and the Negro peoples, who frequently manifest complete abandonment in their amusement. Obscenities appear to be an unfailing source of amusement to the Onges, who indulge in them at every opportunity, even with strangers, and the obscene dances of the womenfolk are a continual source of pleasure. The exchange of obscenities is, indeed, a sign of friendship, and I found that vulgarity was invariably immensely successful in provoking hilarity; any subsequent negotiations were always peaceable and satisfactory.

An extension of this vulgarity is an infantile vanity, not without sexual significance. The care with which their bodies are painted nearly every day is one aspect of this vanity; the more a wife loves her husband the more magnificent the designs she executes on him. The paintings on their bodies reach a peak every two or three days, as the Onges fear illness and death if they are not newly daubed, and the face at least must be continually painted, with at least smears on the chest, arms and legs. A man returning from an exceptionally successful hunting trip is met by his wife with a specially unusual and elaborate design, which she carries out with great devotion. During each of my visits to the island the Onges would rush up to show me their embellishments as soon as they were finished, and took a delight in standing in front of my camera, even though they had no idea what it was for.

It is curious that unlike most primitive peoples, the Onges do not practise tattooing, which is one of the simplest ways, if not *the* simplest, in which such peoples satisfy their craving for physical admiration. The other Andamanese do, puncturing the skin with tiny slivers of obsidian or quartz, but the Onges paint with ochre instead. They love, too, to weave garlands of fruit, flowers and leaves from the forest, returning to the camp laden with them, men and women alike, delighted with their own beauty. This divergence of customs in peoples essentially of the same stock, but separated for long periods of time into endogamous isolates, is very remarkable.

An intense preoccupation with sexual attraction and activity has led to the prevalence of aberration. All the Onges have homosexual tendencies. I became aware of this during my first visit to Little Andaman on one of my longer expeditions, when I had taken only men with me, and on subsequent occasions I therefore allowed the men to bring their wives. The effect of long periods of absence on

11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

the Onges as hiding-places or temporary shelters. In these cavities, which remain full of water right through the dry season, flourish a horde of amphibia, many hitherto unknown.

The great trees are sometimes so close together that it is literally impossible to pass between them, yet it is rare to find two of the same species next to each other, so great is the variety. Huge clumps of ferns are everywhere, hiding the roots of dying trees, hundreds of years old, and fallen trunks rotting on the ground. Some of the thicker and taller trees protect themselves from the monsoon gales by developing buttresses, usually four or six to a tree, which stand out from the trunk like right-angled triangles, with the apex about ten metres from the ground. If a blanket is stretched between the sloping sides of two of the buttresses one can improvise a shelter which is extremely comfortable by local standards, and both man and animals take advantage of this natural cover; I myself took shelter like this on many occasions. (They need to be treated with caution, however, as the local snakes have a predilection for siestas in the darkest corners.) If a hard piece of wood is struck against one of the buttresses it echoes hollowly, and the Andamanese often make use of them to transmit warning messages over considerable distances, using a form of code. A few beats can make every inhabitant within a wide radius vanish from sight, hastily making for the nearest hiding-place. It is hopeless to try and ferret them out once they have been warned, and there is always a risk of being killed by one of their arrows in the process.

Sometimes the Onges used to disappear suddenly for fun. The blackness of their skin is a great help in this, since even on the brightest afternoon it is intensified by the obscurity of the forest. One has a disturbing sensation of being entirely alone, yet knowing that dozens of pairs of eyes are watching as the Onges glide silently from trunk to trunk between the buttresses.

The whole island is a mass of knotted vegetation, and it is useless to attempt to cut any form of lasting path, as the plants immediately grow back. 'Walking' in the Andamans therefore means opening up a way with a hatchet, unless one adopts the rapid but exhausting Onge method of swinging over obstacles by the lianas. This is the kingdom of the epiphytes. The lianas cover their hosts as if determined to hide them, and clumps of orchids hang from nearly every trunk, although their flowers are unfortunately very small.